

Background

In 2003, the Cedar fire destroyed over 30 facilities in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. The restrooms, cabin and storage buildings at Los Caballos were among these destroyed facilities. California State Parks (CSP) planned to restore the facilities at Los Caballos Equestrian Campground with funding provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Replacement of the restroom, with an upgraded facility to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, was underway at Los Caballos Campground. During reconstruction activities the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC), requested both FEMA and CSP to postpone the reconstruction until an assessment of the environmental impacts could be evaluated. The NAHC's concerns were based on the reconstruction activities and the overall campground location relative to cultural resources in the area. In response to this request and new resource information, CSP evaluated possible campground reconfigurations.

The Los Caballos site includes a number of constraints (such as cultural, natural, and topographical), which limited the redesign options. Nevertheless, several conceptual reconfigurations were developed and presented to stakeholder groups at focus meetings in late September-October 2005. These stakeholder groups consisted of equestrians, cultural resource professionals, Native Americans, natural resource professionals, and local businesses. The response CSP received during the focus meetings indicated that none of the preliminary concepts were acceptable to the majority of focus group attendees. The campground could not be designed to substantially avoid the resources of concern without losing the rustic character of Los Caballos that was so loved by the users. Furthermore, the Ah-ha'-Kwe-ah'-mac' village site, which overlaps the Los Caballos campground, is recognized to be especially significant by cultural resource professionals and local tribes of Native Americans. It is this village site for which the area and park was named. In addition, the site was registered as a Sacred Site in 1994 by the CNAHC, the State entity charged with facilitating protection of California's Native American cultural resources in accordance with State and Federal laws. The Sacred Site designation of the village site bestows additional protection to the area that includes Los Caballos. Relevant laws include: Public Resources Code Section 5097.9-.99; The Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990; and American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978. Given the above constraints, restoring the Los Caballos area for camping and day-use parking appears to be infeasible.

Therefore, the Department has determined that it is advisable to search for alternative locations to Los Caballos for the replacement of equestrian family campground facilities in the Cuyamaca Mountains.